

Commentary

Help celebrate important milestone for new staff sergeants

By Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force
Jim Finch

We recently announced the release of the staff sergeant selection list – a time for recognition, celebration and congratulations. Promotion to staff sergeant is an important milestone in any Air Force career, since it marks the transition from airman to noncommissioned officer.

Surprisingly, I've heard a few comments expressing concern over the significant number of people accomplishing this milestone, and I've received several inquiries asking why the selection rate was so high.

Basically, we had an increased number of vacancies at the staff sergeant level, coupled with a decreased pool of eligible senior airmen competing to fill them.

This translated to higher selection rates, as evidenced by this year's 64 percent and last year's 50 percent.

The increased vacancies can be

attributed in part to the decreased retention of mid-level NCOs in recent years and our initiative to reshape the balance of NCOs to airmen in our Air Force. In 1999, we received authorization to increase the percentage of the Air Force enlisted force allowed to serve in the top five grades from 48.5 percent to 56 percent. This initiative allowed us to start reducing the average time in service required to promote our mid-level NCOs.

Despite this explanation, some still speculate that the real reason we increased promotion rates was simply to improve retention. While this wasn't the primary goal behind changing our enlisted force structure, we do hope earlier promotions will translate to improved manning and retention. As most probably already know, we are still short mid-level NCOs in many career fields.

Regarding the few comments I've heard about promoting people too quickly, I only need to look at this



Finch

year's selectees to see we are on track. Of the 20,793 people named on this staff sergeant selection list, more than 90 percent received the top rating on their most recent enlisted performance report.

This tells me that at least three people in their rating chain believed they were ready for immediate promotion and were well-prepared to assume added responsibilities of the next rank.

I personally subscribe to the theory that improving an organization requires everyone to ensure their replacements

have the tools, training and support necessary for continued success. In that vein, I urge everyone currently serving in a supervisory position to help our new staff sergeant selectees adjust to their upcoming role as NCOs. At times, this can be as simple as explaining the logic behind specific decisions or reminding them of the vital part they play in executing our Air Force mission. Keep in mind, these will be the professionals responsible for ensuring most tasks are done correctly.

Also, a little recognition for jobs well done can instill great confidence in new supervisors.

Lastly, we must provide all selectees the opportunity to complete the Airman Leadership School before their line number comes due.

Remember, developing the next generation of enlisted leaders is an investment in our future. The effort we give today will ensure they are prepared to keep our Air Force the best in the world for years to come.



Photo by Airman 1st Class Brian Hill

Senior Airman Jamie Russo, 8th Mission Support Squadron commander's support staff information manager, wins one of the auctions to plant a pie in the face of Maj. John McGarrity, 8th MSS commander, during their squadron's picnic Wednesday. She tries the first time (above) and he ducked away, but she got him in the end (left).